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III.—*The Conclusion of Cicero's De Natura Deorum*

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THE dialogue on the *Nature of the Gods* was arranged by its author in three books. In the first of these, after an introduction in which Cicero, in his own person, speaks of the importance of philosophical speculation upon things divine and of the reflection of such speculation in man's daily relations to his gods and his fellow men, we are admitted with Cicero himself to a conversation at the house of C. Cotta, an adherent of the New Academy. There the Epicurean, C. Velleius, and the Stoic, Q. Lucilius Balbus, are discussing with their host the teachings of their respective systems concerning the divine nature. Book I, then, contains the introduction already mentioned, a résumé by Velleius of the views of philosophers from Thales to his own time, a brief positive statement of the Epicurean tenets, and, finally, an answer to the Epicurean views by the Academic Cotta, far surpassing, both in length and in weight of argument, the positive doctrine which it seeks to refute. Book II contains the Stoic views, set forth in great detail by Balbus, and Book III the arguments of Cotta directed against this Stoic fabric, in a courteous spirit but with a merciless logic and, occasionally, a cutting ridicule. At the end of the book the discussion is terminated by the approach of night. Balbus, the Stoic, hopes for another occasion to answer the arguments of Cotta, who, with the tolerance of one free from dogmatic ties, expresses willingness to learn and openness to conviction. Velleius, remembering his own discomfiture at the hands of Cotta in the presence of his Stoic opponent, delights in the refutation of the Stoic argument by the same Cotta. "And when these things had been said," writes Cicero, who has remained through the discussion an absolutely dumb listener,¹ "we separated, the upshot being² that to Velleius the argu-

¹ And save in II, 104 practically ignored by the disputants.² Mayor's translation of *ita*.

ment of Cotta seemed truer, but to me that of Balbus appeared more inclined to probability.”³

So ends the dialogue. But why does Cicero, who in the first part of Book 1 declares himself an Academic, and who, at his entrance into Cotta’s house is recognized by his friends as the fellow-schoolman and natural supporter of Cotta,⁴ now cast his vote,⁵ not with Cotta and Academicism, but with the Stoic speaker and those views which Cotta has been refuting?⁶ This question I desire briefly to consider, not in confidence of adding anything essentially new, but ready, like Cotta himself, to speak both for and against all views, if the greatest probability may thus be ascertained.

The integrity of the manuscript reading of this passage leaves no suspicion that should lead to emendation,⁷ and the interpretation of the passage in the manner in which I have translated it has been well-nigh universal. One exception, however, should here be noted. The word *Velleio* has been construed, not as a dative, but as an ablative, giving this meaning: “The discussion of Cotta seemed truer than (that of) Velleius, but to me that of Balbus seemed (even) more inclined to probability.” This appears, as Zielinski shows,⁸ to have been the understanding which David Hume had of the passage, when, in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, a work powerfully influenced by the *de Natura Deorum*, he ends with the words: “. . . I confess, that, upon a serious review of the whole, I cannot but think that Philo’s principles are more probable than Demea’s; but that those of Cleanthes approach still nearer to the truth.”⁹ But to this explanation

³ III, 95.

⁴ I, 15; I, 17.

⁵ For the expression of Cicero’s opinion at the end of a dialogue Hirzel (*Dialog*, I, 533) compares *Fin.* v, 95.

⁶ Cf. Krische, *Die theologischen Lehren der griechischen Denker*, 9: “Es ist als wollte Cicero alle dialogischen Künste aufwenden um uns irre zu leiten. . . .”

⁷ The quotation of the remark by the Stoic Q. Cicero (*Div.* I, 9) has been slightly changed. For the Academic phrase *ad veritatis similitudinem* he has substituted the Stoic one *ad veritatem*.

⁸ *Cicero im Wandel der Jahrhunderte*⁸, 231.

⁹ This interpretation Zielinski (*op. cit.*, 358, note on p. 231) states has also been adopted by Mayor in his edition of the *N. D.*, but a search through Mayor’s introduction, apparatus criticus, and notes on the passage has not made this clear to me.

there are strong objections: (a) the brachylogy *Velleio Cottae disputatio verior* in the sense of *Vellei disputatione Cottae disputatio verior*¹⁰; (b) the word *mihi*, which in the usual interpretation contrasts neatly with *Velleio*, is left without antithesis; (c) the difference in expression between *verior* and *ad veritatis similitudinem propensior* is purposely designed by Cicero to indicate the philosophical habits of the respective judges of the argument, the Epicurean Velleius and the Academic Cicero, and this delicate distinction is disregarded by the explanation proposed;¹¹ (d) instead of the comparative *propensior*, if three *disputationes* are involved, the superlative would be more natural. And even were this explanation accepted, the real difficulty remains, why does the argument of Balbus seem more probable than that of Cotta? And why does Cicero place such a statement as this in this very significant and important position?¹² Many answers have been made to this question, which must have been constantly asked by readers of the dialogue, from the time of Q. Cicero, but of these it is not my purpose to attempt an elaborate collection, or to touch, save in foot-notes, upon any except a few of the more significant. The answers, so far as I have studied them, fall under two or three main heads.

I. Cicero, who usually sides with Cotta and speaks through him,¹³ here utters a deliberate falsehood, with intent to deceive some or all of his readers. The reasons alleged are two: (i) fear of criticism on the ground of atheism, and (ii) unwillingness, from political policy, to weaken the hold of the state religion. The first of these explanations is stated most definitely by St. Augustine, in a chapter of the

¹⁰ This might, to be sure, be paralleled in Cicero; cf. Mayor's edition, III, index, s.v. *Brachylogy*.

¹¹ For the attempt to vary the phraseology with the speaker cf. note 7, *supra*.

¹² Hirzel, *Dialog*, I, 533: "Cicero hat überdies, was seine Rolle im Dialog an Umfang abgeht, durch die Gewichtigkeit der Worte, welche er spricht, ersetzt."

¹³ That Cicero's attitude is really the sceptic one of Cotta is the view of various writers, e.g., Ernesti, *Init. Doctr. Solid.*, 238-9 and arg. *N.D.* I (according to Krische, *op. cit.*, 9, n. 1); Heindorf, *N.D.* (1815), addenda, p. xii; Dunlop, *Hist. of Rom. Lit.*² (1824), II, 417; Simcox, *Hist. of Lat. Lit.* I, 168.

de Civitate Dei,¹⁴ in which he is dealing with predestination. "Cicero attempted," he says, "to say that which is written, 'The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God,' but he did not venture to say it in his own person. For he saw how unpopular and offensive that would be, and so he made Cotta discuss this subject against the Stoics in the books on the *Nature of the Gods*, and on the side of Lucilius Balbus, to whom he had given the part of the Stoics to defend, he preferred to cast his vote, rather than in behalf of Cotta, who maintained that there was no divine nature. In the books on divination, however, in his own person, perfectly openly, he opposes the foreknowledge of the future." And elsewhere¹⁵ Augustine charges that Cicero would not dare to whisper in public the views which he so eloquently defends in this discussion.

Apprehensions for the effects upon the state religion might be thought to be seen in the *de Divinatione*,¹⁶ emphasizing the words of Cotta in the *de Natura Deorum*,¹⁷ and are clearly expressed by Lactantius,¹⁸ who says: "Cicero recognized that the objects which men worshipped were false. For when he had said many things that amounted to the overturning of religious beliefs he yet asserted that those things are not to be discussed commonly, lest such a discussion should destroy the publicly adopted religious ceremonies." Elsewhere Lactantius also specifies that it is "the whole third book on the *Nature of the Gods*" which "overturns and destroys from the foundation all religious beliefs."¹⁹ Furthermore, Arnobius²⁰ rejoices in the destructive effects of the Ciceronian works upon the pagan polytheism, and says

¹⁴ v, 9. And in the same chapter he says: Aut enim esse Deum negat, quod quidem inducta alterius persona in libris de deorum natura molitus est; aut si esse confitetur Deum, quem negat praescium futurorum, etiam sic nihil dicit aliud quam quod ille dixit insipiens in corde suo: Non est Deus.

¹⁵ IV, 30; cf. Cic. *N.D.* I, 61.

¹⁶ I, 8: ne communia iura migrare videatur; cf. II, 148.

¹⁷ III, 93: de natura deorum, non ut eam tollerem. . . .

¹⁸ *Div. Inst.* II, 3, 2. The sentence preceding that here quoted is also of interest.

¹⁹ *Div. Inst.* I, 17, 4.

²⁰ *Adv. Nat.* III, 6.

that he hears of proposals that the senate should cause these books to be suppressed.

But Cicero could really have felt little fear from charges of atheism or of disturbing the established religion. For, in the first place, had these fears been very serious, he would hardly have published the work at all. And it must be borne in mind²¹ that the spread of philosophic ideas was greatly restricted by lack of printing and other means of dissemination, so that the books of Cicero, though undoubtedly influencing a few²² interested in philosophical studies, would hardly have precipitated a religious revolution in the general public. Suggestive are the remarks of Cotta in the first book:²³ "The first inquiry in this question concerning the nature of the gods is, whether there are gods or not. It is hard (you say) to deny that. I suppose so, if the question were asked in a public meeting, but in a conversation and gathering of this sort it is very easy. And so I myself, a pontifex, who think that public rites and observances are to be most scrupulously maintained, should still like to be convinced of this first point, that the gods exist, and convinced not by opinion alone, but also in accordance with the real truth." Had Cicero sincerely feared charges of atheism, would he have revealed so clearly the difference between exoteric and esoteric philosophizing in the school of which he was reputed a member? And, in the second place, he was not so simple-minded as to suppose that he could, by so flimsy a device as this, shift the responsibility for his views upon the shoulders of Cotta.²⁴ That the opinions expressed

²¹ Cf. Hivet, *Le Christ. et ses origines*, II, 98 (quoted by Thiaucourt, *Essai sur les Traité philosophiques de Cicéron* (1885), 249-250).

²² The influence ascribed by Cicero (*N.D.* I, 6; I, 8; *Div.* II, 5; *Off.* II, 2) to his previous works must be thought of, I believe, as limited in its range — perhaps more so than Cicero's vanity would suppose. And it is to be noted that the vogue of such works as had been written by others was mainly restricted to those of the popular Epicurean philosophy (cf. Reid, *Acad.*, p. 21).

²³ I, 61.

²⁴ That the apparent atheism expressed would seem less shocking and blasphemous in the mouth of a theologian, accustomed to discuss such themes, than in that of a layman, as Hirzel (*Dialog*, I, 532) suggests, is a point which loses something of its weight from the fact that Cotta is speaking not as a theologian

were likely to be, and often were, held as Cicero's own is well shown by the references already given to Arnobius, Lactantius, and Augustine.

II. According to a second view, Cicero in these words speaks the exact truth, for the *disputatio* of Balbus does seem to him fundamentally truer than that of Cotta. An Academic by profession, he is by sympathies and at heart a Stoically inclined eclectic,²⁵ and while he may not accept

but as a philosopher, and in *N.D.* III, 5–6, rather sharply separates these two standpoints. In fact he considers as irrelevant the personal appeals of Balbus, who keeps suggesting his religious office (II, 168; III, 5; III, 94), in a way similar to that in which Q. Cicero in the *de Divinatione* frequently reminds Marcus of his augurship as a reason why he should hold an orthodox belief in divination (e.g., I, 25, *auspicia vestra*; I, 29, *collega tuus*; I, 30, *lituus vester*; I, 72, *vestri (libri) augurales*; I, 105, *tuuae partes sunt, tuum, inquam, auspiciorum patrociniū debet esse*; I, 105, *collegae tui*).

²⁵ Goedekemeyer, *Gesch. des gr. Skeptizismus*, 150, n. 7; Kindervater, *Anmerkungen u. Abhandlungen über Cicero's Bücher von der Natur der Götter* (1792), II, 288–289; and in his edition of the *N.D.* (1796), on III, 95; Creuzer (*ad N.D.* III, 95), who tries to distinguish between the attitude of Cicero the lawyer and controversialist, speaking in the Academic manner, and Cicero the philosopher, seeking for the most probable principles by which to guide his life. Against the use of the term 'eclectic' for Cicero cf. Reid, *Acad.*, pp. 13 ff. Cudworth, *Intellectual System*² (1743), I, 435, well expresses this second view by saying: "though he [Cicero] did not assent to the Stoical doctrine of theology in every point, (himself being rather a Platonist than a Stoic) yet he did much prefer it before, not only the Epicureism of *Velleius*, but also the scepticism of *Cotta*." And Cudworth cites many passages from Cicero's other works in the attempt to discover his real positive opinions. Hirzel (*Dialog*, I, 533) states that Cicero here shows his own belief in a positive manner, and answers that curiosity of the reader which in I, 10 he had censured. Again (I, 534) he says: "Cicero lenkte nach einer Periode der akademischen Skepsis wieder in die Bahnen einer positiven Philosophie ein, deren Höhepunkt für uns die ganz dogmatisch-stoische Darstellung 'von den Pflichten' bezeichnet." On p. 534, n. 2, Hirzel admits, in the *de Divinatione* and the *de Fato*, a short relapse into scepticism, based upon special reasons. Cf. p. 538: "Cicero ist hier (in the *de Div.*) wieder akademischer Skeptiker geworden, nachdem er in der Schrift 'vom Wesen der Götter' sich auf die Seite der Stoia gestellt hatte." The reasons he gives on pp. 538–9. Giambelli (*ad N.D.* III, 95) thinks Cicero not an Academic verging toward Stoicism, but almost a Stoic tempering the assertiveness of his belief by Academic qualifications, and this appears to have been nearly the view of Petrarch (*De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, ed. of Capelli (1906), p. 54), who thinks of Cicero as approving the opinions of Balbus, but with Academic *έπισχή* not wishing to say more than that they seemed to him 'more probable.' Thiaucourt (*op. cit.*, 248) gives a very different reason for the same result: ". . . pour être athée et

every detail of the Stoic view, he is sufficiently in accord with its main tenets to say that it is more probable than the destructive arguments of Cotta. Although inclining toward the Stoic doctrines, in making up the work from divergent sources he has perhaps allowed the sceptic rebuttal and Cotta's "zeal for arguing against the gods"²⁶ to run away with him. The arguments of Cotta are, in fact, when carefully examined, less sound than they at first appear,²⁷ and differ strikingly from the views of Cicero himself as elsewhere put forth,²⁸ and those of Balbus might be much more cogently expressed.²⁹ Mayor well summarizes the theory under discussion by saying that the Academic arguments could not all be convincingly answered, that "then, as now, the Divine government was a matter of faith, not of certainty . . . that, logically speaking, the religious view of the order of the world is only the more probable; that Cicero in fact is right, as against the Stoics, when he refuses to say more than that the argument of Balbus appeared to him to be *ad veritatis similitudinem propensior*."³⁰ Or, as Mayor elsewhere says:³¹ "The conclusion of his argument . . . may be considered to point the way, vaguely indeed and hesitatingly, to the mysticism of later times, when the human mind, wearied out with its fruitless search after truth, abjured reason for faith, and surrendered itself blindly either to the traditions of priests or to the inward vision of the Neo-Platonists."

Such are the explanations offered, and in them there is much that is undeniably true. Certain opposing arguments should not, however, be lost to sight. (i) First, Cicero does

s'avouer à soi-même son athéisme il faut une certaine fermeté d'intelligence dont Cicéron paraît avoir toujours manqué."

²⁶ *Div.* I, 8.

²⁷ G. F. Schömann, *N.D.*, Einl. 3, n.; Mayor, *N.D.*, vol. III, introd. xx-xxiv.

²⁸ E.g., in the résumé in *Acad.* II, 118 ff., where much is quite different.

²⁹ W. G. Tennemann, *Gesch. der Philosophie* (1805), v. 121, urges that the apparent victory of the sceptic is too lightly won, on account of the presentation of easily refutable stories, such as those of divine apparitions and of divination, alongside of more serious doctrines, which, if better expounded, would win the day. Compare what Cicero himself writes in *N.D.* III, 65; *Div.* I, 9.

³⁰ III, p. xxiv.

³¹ I, p. xxxvii.

not say that it is the *principles* of the Stoics, but the *argument* of Balbus, which seems the more probable. (ii) In the second place, even Mayor admits that "none except the extremest partisans could pretend that the Academic difficulties were entirely cleared up by such considerations as were available on the other side."³² (iii) Thirdly, the arguments of Balbus are all before us, but a considerable and important part of those of Cotta,³³ dealing with the question of Providence, has been lost,³⁴ leaving his discussion at an obvious disadvantage as compared with that of Balbus. (iv) In the fourth place, Cicero takes particular pains, in the introduction to Book I, to speak of himself as an Academic, to praise Academic principles,³⁵ and to represent himself as recognized by the disputants, at his appearance among them, as an adherent of this school.³⁶ (v) And, finally, the whole arrangement of the dialogue, with the advantage of the last word given to the Academic rather than to the Stoic, is an indication of the author's sympathies which cannot be entirely ignored. In short, if the work was written with the intention of gaining converts for any other system than that of Academic scepticism, its plans have been most ill arranged, its details most

³² III, p. xxiv.

³³ The lacunae in III, 64-65.

³⁴ Perhaps through the malevolent influence of the pagan opponents of the work described by Arnobius (*adv. Nat.* III, 6; cf. Thiaucourt, *op. cit.*, 241), perhaps by the Christians, who felt, as Thiaucourt (*op. cit.*, 249) suggests, that the work was destructive of all belief in divine Providence (cf. also Dunlop, *Hist. of Rom. Lit.*² (1824), II, 419; Hivet, *Le Christ. et ses origines*, II, 75 (cited by Thiaucourt, 242, n. 1)), perhaps by mere accident. For its contents cf. Neumann, *Rh. Mus.* XXXVI (1881), 155-7, and Schwenke, *Burs. Jahresb.* XI, 2, 99; *Berl. phil. Woch.* VIII (1888), Sp. 1308 f. Later Christian attitude towards the work may perhaps be seen in a list of recommended text-books from the end of the twelfth century, probably by Alexander Neckam (C. H. Haskins, *Harv. Stud. in Class. Phil.* XX (1909), 91): "Salustius et Tullius de oratore et thuscanarum et de amicitia et de senectute et de fato multa commendacione digni sunt et paradoxe. Liber inscriptus de multitudine deorum a quibusdam reprobatur." In this connection may be mentioned the publication by 'P. Seraphinus,' in 1811, of a fourth book of the *de Natura Deorum*, in which Cicero is made to foreshadow many of the main points of Roman Catholic dogma! The importance of the section on Providence may perhaps be inferred from III, 94, where Balbus considers it the part of the argument especially demanding a reply from the Stoics.

³⁵ I, I; I, 11-14.

³⁶ I, 17.

unsuccessfully executed, and the purposes of its author everywhere, with the single exception of this final sentence, most thoroughly concealed. The theory, then, of the absolute truth of Cicero's words is by no means so simple as it might at first appear.

III. The two theories so far discussed assume a more or less polemic, or at least protreptic, purpose on the part of the author, and to this impression the form of the dialogue, and the attempts in it and in its pendant, the *de Divinatione*, to discriminate between *religio* and *supersticio* very naturally contribute. Yet I believe that if the work be regarded rather as descriptive in aim,³⁷ and striving, in a somewhat unsuccessful way, for objectivity, some of the more important difficulties raised by its last sentence can be most easily met. Cicero's plan for constructing a sort of encyclopaedic philosophical library, which should put the essence of Greek philosophy before his fellow-countrymen in their own language, is too familiar to need more than mention.³⁸ In such a scheme the philosophy of religion was to have its place.³⁹ Unfortunately Cicero had no single comprehensive, and at the same time impartial, Greek source, describing upon a uniform scale the beliefs of the different schools, and to supply this lack he had recourse to that method of mixed sources (in this case hastily and carelessly combined) which is the challenge, the delight, and, finally, the despair of the philologist. To this descriptive purpose is due the catalogue of views of earlier philosophers put into the mouth of Velleius in Book I.⁴⁰ That it is out of proportion to the exposition of the positive Epicurean tenets; that it is somewhat unusual for a Roman Epicurean

³⁷ The adoption of such an aim Hirzel (*Dialog*, I, 533) lays to Cicero's lack of success in his earlier works in gaining Roman converts to an apparently unpractical Academic scepticism.

³⁸ Cf. *N.D.* I, 7-9; I, 13; *Div.* II, 1-5 (especially 4-5); Reid, *Acad.*, pp. 20 ff.

³⁹ His purpose is here entirely different from that of such a work as Varro's *Antiquitates divinae*. Cf. Hirzel, *Dialog*, I, 531; Thiaucourt, *op. cit.*, 247. The contrast with Cicero's own attitude in the *de Republica* and the *de Legibus* is properly noted by Hirzel. Krische (*op. cit.*, 8) will not admit the historical or descriptive purpose.

⁴⁰ I, 25-41.

to be so much interested in others' views;⁴¹ that its statements are faulty and Epicurean in bias,⁴² are, no doubt, sound objections to it, yet in our condemnation we must not fail to notice that such a résumé was, in this descriptive plan, needed near the beginning of the work, and inasmuch as Cicero had selected the Epicurean as the first speaker in the dialogue, it was doubtless an easy and time-saving device to put into his mouth this catalogue taken from an Epicurean source.⁴³ And since the views rehearsed were, for the greater part, obsolete, the injustice done by Velleius' one-sided refutation of them was less important than it would otherwise have seemed.

The plan of the dialogue contemplates more especial representation of the philosophical schools most in vogue,⁴⁴ the Peripatetics being in this treatment roughly grouped with the Stoics.⁴⁵ Three principal reasons may perhaps be seen in the introduction of Epicurean and Stoic speeches followed by an Academic rebuttal: (i) first, the attempt by criticism to neutralize the unfair impression given by the strictly partisan exposition of Epicurean or Stoic doctrines which Cicero doubtless found in his sources⁴⁶; (ii) second, the attempt to give greater unity to the work by introducing the central and

⁴¹ I, 58; I, 91; II, 73.

⁴² Mayor, I, introd., p. li; III, p. xvi. But for the contrary opinion compare the judgment of J. S. Reid given by Duff, *Lit. Hist. of Rome*, 390, n. 1.

⁴³ The theories of Hirzel, Schwenke, and Reinhardt as to what this source was need not here concern us.

⁴⁴ I, 16. Thiaucourt (*op. cit.*, 250) notes that Cicero considers only the theories of philosophers in regard to religion, not the beliefs of different religions themselves, and even within these limits confines himself chiefly to Epicureanism and Stoicism. The latter fact, as he recognizes, is probably largely due to the restrictions imposed upon him by his sources.

⁴⁵ I, 16.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Div.* I, 7: *faciendum videtur, ut diligenter etiam atque etiam argumenta cum argumentis comparemus, ut fecimus in iis tribus libris quos de natura deorum scripsimus.* Had the dialogue been arranged on the plan of alternate question and answer, like those of Plato, a more moderate result might have been reached, without the extremes of the pendulum shown in the grouping of Epicurean and Academic and the Stoic and Academic views. But such an arrangement would have been better adapted to a polemic or protreptic work, aiming at some decisive conclusion, than to one which is mainly descriptive of the opinions of others.

connecting figure of Cotta; (iii) and third, and most important from the descriptive purpose of the work, the recognition that, historically and objectively, the classic arguments against various views were as much a proper subject for study and description as the positive statements which they refute, just as a church history would be incomplete which should fail to narrate the tenets of heresies and opponents of the church as well as those of the accepted faith.

That Cicero should not have attained the desired objectivity need occasion little surprise, when we reflect how rarely is it to be found in discussions of such themes, even in modern times. How much less practicable was it in a work so hastily composed from heterogeneous and ill-digested sources! Yet with this theory of Cicero's intention clearly in mind let us consider the possible reasons for the statement in the final sentence, and I think that we shall find that one important explanation already discussed can, in this connection, be used with greater reasonableness and probability.

(i) Cicero desires to be impartial. This desire is plainly indicated at his appearance on the scene of the dialogue,⁴⁷ where he represents himself as disclaiming the necessity of supporting any particular set of doctrines, even Academic ones. To give to the reader the same privilege he feels that arguments should be stated, the views of the author kept in the background, and the reader left to form his own opinions, free from the benumbing influences of that authority of others, which he in several places so emphatically condemns.⁴⁸ And not only is it permissible for the author to veil his own convictions, but it should be nobody's concern to try to discover them.⁴⁹ This feeling justifies Cicero in representing himself in the dialogue as virtually a *κωφὸν πρόσωπον*,

⁴⁷ I, 17.

⁴⁸ I, 10; I, 66; *Div.* II, 150; *Rep.* I, 59; I, 70; *Tusc.* V, 11; Reid on *Acad.* II, 8, and the passages there collected.

⁴⁹ I, 6; I, 10 (and cf. Jerome, *Comm. in Isaiam*, xi, *prolog.*). In *N.D.* II, 2, Balbus makes a clumsy attempt to discover the opinions of Cotta, which is met with a prompt rebuff. Thiaucourt (*op. cit.*, 248) suggests, however, that from the author of a work on this subject one has a right to expect an expression of opinion.

and, in an almost whimsical manner,⁵⁰ casting his vote where it would hardly have been expected. In fact, Cicero the author may perhaps have taken a little liberty with Cicero the character in the dialogue, and always to seek for identity of sentiment between the two is hardly safe.

(ii) In the second place, Cicero realized that the Academic position was liable to be misunderstood. The New Academy was accustomed, as he says,⁵¹ "for the sake of discovering the truth, to speak not only against all other philosophies but also for them." Yet, from the necessities of the case, the arguments of Cotta have, in this dialogue, been almost wholly negative and destructive.⁵² If, then, Cicero were to side with his fellow-schoolman, the danger would arise that what is intended as an example of Academic *method* would, in the minds of some readers, from the authoritative consensus of the two Academics present, be considered rather as Academic *dogma*, and this Cicero was especially concerned to avoid.

(iii) And there is no doubt that Cicero's sympathies were divided. Much in the Stoic system, freed from grosser elements, such as its pantheistic notions, its fatalism, and its mantic, has attraction for him; it is the Stoic proof, the discussion of Balbus, which, as Cotta says, "makes doubtful by its argument that which is in itself by no means doubtful."⁵³ To suppose, then, that he really accepts the Stoic's *disputatio* is, I think, wrong; it is the positive convictions which lie beneath it to which, "believing where he cannot prove," his assent is inclined. And one further advantage came from this assent being thus formally expressed. Any defects in the Stoic system were already sufficiently evident even without the explicit *auctoritas* of the author to emphasize them, hence no reader would be led into serious error as a result of Cicero's declaration. But Cicero was an intensely practical man, and despite the influence of his legal training, which

⁵⁰ Cf. n. 6, *supra*.

⁵¹ I, 11.

⁵² Cotta is made to recognize this fact, and it is repeatedly made clear that it is not the existence of the gods but the Stoic argument for their existence which is being attacked, *e.g.* III, 10; III, 44; III, 93; *Div.* I, 8; II, 148. Compare also the attitude of Carneades towards justice (Cic. *Rep.* III, 11).

⁵³ III, 10; cf. III, 64.

might have fitted him to look at both sides of a question and suspend his judgment of it, he seems to have been a little nettled by the charge that the Academy was unpractical, in that "it took away the light and cast a sort of darkness over things."⁵⁴ "It cannot be," he says, "that those who philosophize according to this system have no principle to follow,"⁵⁵ and he shows that it is probability rather than certainty by which the Academic regulates his actions. The formal assent to Stoic principles which he gives in the final sentence of the dialogue is an example alike of the freedom from dogmatic requirements allowed to the Academics and of the possibility of using such individual liberty for the acceptance of any practical working principle.⁵⁶

That by this theory all difficulties are removed or that Cicero's personal religion is clearly revealed I do not assert, but I do feel that to regard the *Nature of the Gods* as a work primarily descriptive rather than polemic in purpose leaves the explanation of these questions at least no more difficult, and simplifies considerably the understanding of that final sentence with which this inquiry has been especially concerned.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ I, 6.

⁵⁵ I, 10; *Acad.* II, 66; *Off.* II, 7.

⁵⁶ Schömann, *N.D.*, Einl. 14; Goedeckemeyer, *op. cit.*, 148; Reid, *Acad.*, pp. 14-15; note 25, *supra*.

⁵⁷ For résumés of some of the opinions of earlier scholars see Creuzer's *N.D.* (1818), pp. 693-4, n.; Krische, *op. cit.*, 9, n. 1. Heindorf, *N.D.* (1815), p. 7, n., thinks that the *benivolos obiurgatores* and the *invidos vituperatores* of I, 5, are represented by Balbus and Velleius respectively; hence the difference in the ways in which they are treated, in accordance with Cicero's announcement in I, 5. This view is justly refuted by Krische, *op. cit.*, 9, n. 1. To Höfig's work on *Cicero's Ansicht v. d. Staatsreligion* I have not had access.